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FIFTY YEARS

CHARLES REYNOLDS BROWN

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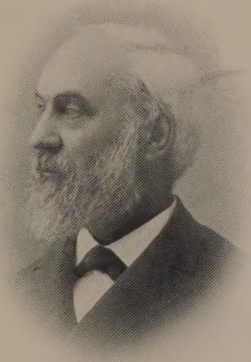
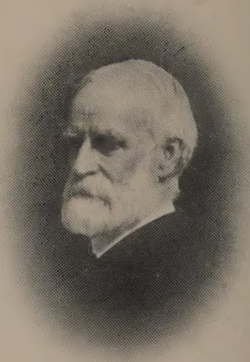
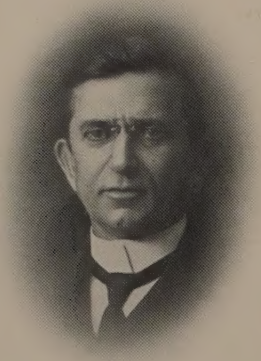
ANNIVERSARY SERMON



Rev. George Mooar, D. D.



Rev. John Knox McLean, D. D.



Rev. Charles Reynolds Brown

Pastors of the First Congregational Church

Oakland, California

FIFTY YEARS

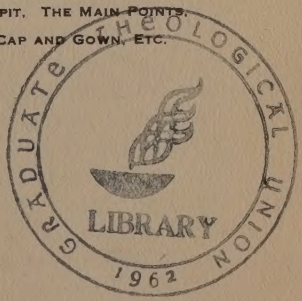
An Anniversary Sermon

BY

CHARLES REYNOLDS BROWN

AUTHOR OF

FAITH AND HEALTH, THE YOUNG MAN'S AFFAIRS, THE SOCIAL MESSAGE OF THE MODERN PULPIT, THE MAIN POINTS, OUR TOTAL CHRISTIANITY, CAP AND GOWN, ETC.



DELIVERED SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 20TH, 1910
AT THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
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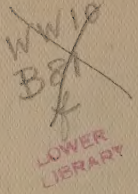

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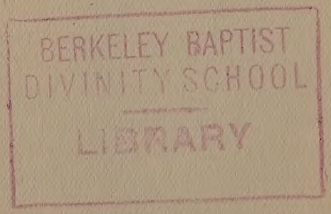

FIFTY YEARS

"Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year; it shall be a jubilee unto you."—Leviticus 25:10.

THE religious leaders of that early day understood well the value of times and seasons. One Holy Day in every seven held apart from their accustomed toil and consecrated to the interests of the higher life, as a time of special opportunity—this helped to make all the intervening days holier! One Sabbatical year in every seven when the spirit of leisure and of mercy received particular emphasis, helped to promote the spirit of thoughtfulness and of kindliness in all the intervening years! One year of jubilee at the end of each fifty years of their national history when all Hebrew slaves were emancipated and all mortgaged property returned to its owner freed from encumbrance, added to the sense of human brotherhood through the release it brought to many a life held captive, and to many a burdened home. The year of jubilee had a profound economic significance as well as moral value—it prevented the permanent alienation of land from

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the family line and made against that monoply of privilege in the hands of a few which is a menace to the well-being of any country. It was a wholesome provision, it was a word of the Lord which came to them saying, "Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year; it shall be unto you a year of jubilee."

We have reached the end of the fiftieth year of our history as a church. We have no slaves to be emancipated, for only "One is our Master, even Christ" and His truth has made us free. We have no mortgage upon our church property for which we need to beg relief. Since the heroic, self-sacrificing, generous efforts of pastor and people on that memorable Easter Day in 1882 when a debt of $45,000 was cleared off, there has been no debt upon this church and please God there shall not be. But it is fitting that in ways appropriate and with such deeds of love as the Spirit may prompt, we as a church should hallow this fiftieth year and make it a time of jubilee.

The first public service held by this people was on November 18, 1860, fifty years ago last Friday. The Rev. George Pierson who was to supply the pulpit until a pastor could be secured, preached the first sermon. A few days later the Rev. E. S. Lacey, then pastor of the First Congregational church of San Francisco, met seven-

teen persons here, and with his counsel they entered into covenant and organized the First Congregational Church of Oakland.

The following May the Rev. George Mooar, the first pastor, arrived and entered upon his noble service. He was a graduate of Williams College and of Andover Seminary. In the spirit of missionary devotion he left a church of three hundred and fifty members there in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to come to this new and strange land to lead this little band who had called him to be their minister. He came before the days of Pullman trains to California—the railroad was not completed until nine years after he started west. He came with his wife and three little children, around by the Isthmus of Panama, and entered in through the Golden Gate to enter upon that service which this community will never forget.

He was a man of noble presence, of genial manner, of strong and sane intellectual life and of deep personal piety. He was an effective preacher, and a pastor greatly beloved. The little church prospered under his ministry and built the house of worship which stood so long yonder at Tenth and Washington Streets. After eleven years he resigned from this church to become a professor in the Pacific Theological Seminary where he continued an able and help-

ful instructor in that school of the prophets up to the time of his death. The text of his first sermon was, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,"—it sounded the keynote of his whole life and ministry, intense personal loyalty to Jesus Christ.

In April, 1872, the second pastor of this church arrived in Oakland. John Knox McLean, graduate of Union College and of Princeton Theological Seminary, preacher, pastor, citizen, great hearted friend and large minded Christian statesman. His first sermon had in it the spirit of willing service and the breadth of outlook characteristic of his entire ministry. It was from the text "So much as in me is I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."

His pastorate continued for twenty-three years, and notable years they were. The church grew until it had a membership of more than a thousand with a branch at Oak Chapel numbering one hundred more. This splendid structure at Twelfth and Clay Streets where we worship today was reared and was paid for out of the pockets of the generous people. The enlarging church under his leadership related itself in helpful fashion to the religious, the educational, the charitable and the civic interests of this grow-

ing city. Its influence and usefulness went out into all the state and caused the hearts of many in all parts of California to rise up and call it blessed. In April, 1895, Dr. McLean resigned the pastorate of this church to become president of the Pacific Theological Seminary. He has continued in that service to this hour with the love and gratitude of a wide and loyal constituency won by his work and his worth during these thirty-eight years he has resided in California.

The first of October, 1896, the third pastor came to enter upon his fourteen years of service. It was a venture of faith on both sides. The minister had never seen the church nor met a single member of it when he was called; and no committee or member of this church had seen or heard the new minister. They were walking by faith and not by sight. But he found such loyal and generous people, ready to welcome and to co-operate with him, that these have been the happiest and most fruitful years in all his life. And when he reflects upon all that they have meant to him and to those he loves, he feels now that no other church, no other work can ever be to him what this church has been.

And let me say in the first person and out of a full heart how much I am indebted to the two noble and godly men who were my predecessors.

They were both with me here in this pulpit that first Sunday when every face before me save that of my dear wife was a strange face. They were here with me and by their years, their worth, their record of Christian usefulness written in this community, they made the young fellow of thirty-three feel that the work cut out for him in following in their steps was indeed an exacting task. But the love and prayers and generous commendation of those two older men were to me like an open door ushering me speedily into the confidence and affection of the people. If my own father had been named not for "Benjamin Franklin," as he was, but for "John Knox," if his last name had been "McLean" and he had been standing in this man's shoes with this man's hold upon this community, he could not have done more in those opening months and years of my own pastorate to help establish me in the hearts of this people! And that kindness has been constant and beautiful through all these years. Dr. McLean, we all love you; and we are but a sample of a great multitude of people whom you have helped and who will ever hold you in affectionate esteem.

But it may be that I am dwelling too long upon the three ministers of this church. No church is made up of the ordained and clerical men who hold official positions. The church is

made up from those believing and aspiring men and women quickened and organized by the spirit of the living God until they become worthy to stand forth as a visible section of the great body of Christ.

This church has been richly blessed in its laymen and laywomen. Where there are so many noble names it seems almost invidious to name a few and to omit others. Time would fail me to tell of R. E. Cole and Galen M. Fisher, of Samuel T. Alexander and James M. Haven, of Martin Kellogg and Israel W. Knox, of Caleb Sadler and R. D. Yelland, who through faith obtained promises, wrought righteousness and rendered a good account of their stewardship before they entered into their reward. And a long list of noble Christian women by their deeds and their love have written a record which would fill all this place where we are sitting with a fragrance like that of the broken alabaster box. And among the living there are hundreds of Christians true, fine, unselfish, devoted, who have made possible the splendid record of usefulness which stands over against the name of this church.

Without attempting then any further the detailed history of this church let me use the remainder of the hour to indicate a few of the leading notes in the life of this congregation. It

has been characterized in all these fifty years by the spirit of peace and unity. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye love one another"—this was the original test of Christian life proposed by Christ Himself, and none better has been found. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment which ran down upon Aaron's beard; it is like the dew of Hermon which descended upon the mountains of Zion." Here there have been no church quarrels, no unhappy divisions to hinder the work of Christ! Here no pastor has ever been sent away in bitterness and no pastor has aught but grateful words to speak of the love and loyalty of the people whom he has served! It has been a church of free and resolute souls, each man thinking, speaking, acting as seemed to him best, but forbearing one another in love so that they might keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

In the second place it has been a church characterized by a large minded readiness to recognize the right of men to think even though they might differ in their thinking. One of its pastors was educated at Princeton, the home of intelligent conservatism. Another pastor at Boston and in Harvard had come under the influence of some of the newer and more liberal conceptions

of spiritual reality. Here in this church were those who felt that one of these men was nearer the truth and here were those who were more inclined to hold with the other, but the ministrations of both were welcomed and there has been no division nor unrest. Here in this church are men and women who hold in the main to the convictions expressed by John Calvin and the great reformers; here are those who follow gladly the interpretations of Lyman Abbott and George A. Gordon. Yet varied as has been their thinking there have been no heresy trials, no theological quarrels, no persecution because of opinion, no divisions which would hinder the work of Christ. We do not all emphasize the same words or accent the same syllables in our varying interpretations of the eternal mystery, but we may work together in the spirit of Christian unity. This church has been characterized by large intellectual hospitality and this has contributed steadily to its peace of mind and of heart.

It has been a church full of the spirit of Christian democracy. The church began with a small membership and very moderate financial resources. It has grown in membership to be one of the five largest Congregational churches in the United States—only one other church west of the Hudson River equals it in membership.

Its financial resources have become considerable. But there has never crept in the least suggestion of the spirit of snobbishness or of exclusive aristocracy. I entered the Clay street parlors one day when seventy-five or more women, members of our Ladies' Aid Society, were sewing for the needy. As I glanced around the room I saw a member of this church, the wife of a wealthy man, whose means could not be indicated with less than six or seven figures, sitting beside a woman whose husband as I happened to know was working at that time for two dollars a day. They were sitting together, chatting and sewing in friendly intimacy, for they had been friends for years. And it never entered the mind of the woman whose husband was poor to feel any embarrassment from the presence of this wealthy woman and it never entered the mind of the woman of means to condescend in patronizing fashion to the woman whose resources were so meager. They were friends and fellow Christians in the house of their Father and that was all there was to it. This is the spirit of the church. Here are men who are large employers of labor and here in this congregation every Sunday in the year are many men and women who earn their livings with their hands and belong to the various branches of organized labor. All this is well understood in the community.

The liberty of utterance on civic and industrial questions so readily accorded to the pastors of this church is recognized on all hands. The church might well write over its doors that ancient text, "The rich and the poor meet together and the Lord is the maker of them all." It is a church characterized by the spirit of Christian democracy.

It has stood for the dignity and the beauty of worship. The church has always secured a hearing for its message without resorting to the sensational claptrap which sometimes defaces the modern city pulpit. It has never sought to put upon the lips of its people the pious ragtime of cheap and flimsy religious songs. It has steadily trained them to sing God's praise in the great hymns of the ages set to the noblest tunes of the best composers. It has given generously of its money and of its appreciation to the work of one of the greatest choirs of our denomination anywhere east or west. It has believed that if it is good to select men with capacity and training to utter the message of help in speech, it is worth while to do the same for that message and appeal which comes to us in Christian song. And the work of these trained and select singers has been sustained by the presence of a large volunteer choir who have given generously of their time and their talents to the ennobling and

enrichment of our service of worship. "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," as well as in the sanctity of it, might well be inscribed across the face of our organ.

It has been a church intensely interested in education. In the early days of our denominational life in New England the meeting house and the school house were sometimes one house. Material was scarce and in the same building where the minister preached on Sunday the school teacher instructed the youth on Monday. And this educational method has never quite gotten out of our system in our church affairs—I hope it never will. It was their desire for a trained ministry which led those early Congregationalists to found Harvard and Yale, Williams and Dartmouth, Amherst and Bowdoin and a long list of other colleges. Two pastors of this church have gone forth into educational work in the Theological Seminary. Frequently has this church been drawn upon for ministry to the higher life of the institution at the University of California and at Stanford, in Yale and in Cornell and other institutions of learning. Here in our pews are almost a hundred public school teachers and principals, not all members of the church, but pew-holders and regular attendants. Here in our pews, especially at the evening services, are large numbers of high school boys

and girls and students from the University yonder seeking to build their college training upon that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. This church was the first one in the west to engage a salaried superintendent to give his whole time to the work of religious instruction in the Sunday School. This was the first church in the west to introduce a thorough graded system reaching from the kindergarten up to a teachers' training class. It has held and has utilized the educational point of view and method in all its ministry.

It has been a church with an active interest in civic affairs. During my own pastorate three different mayors of Oakland have been selected from this congregation. Men prominent and useful in the political life of the state and men holding important federal positions are upon our roll of membership. Here is a body of intelligent and conscientious citizens who again and again have shown themselves effective in supporting or in opposing measures before the City Council, before the Board of Supervisors, before the Legislature and at the polls. In the recent charter convention to frame a new constitution for the city two of the most active and useful of the fifteen freeholders were also active and useful members of this church. There has been no disposition here to hold aloof from politics

because they were "common and unclean"—if in any section of civic life politics are unclean it is the business of Christian men to go in and help rectify them. The powers that be are ordained of God and for the realization of that great ideal it is necessary that Christian men should be active, public-spirited and useful citizens.

It has been a church characterized by the spirit of unselfishness. In the first year of its history when its membership was less than a score and the financial resources were meager they bravely voted to be self-supporting. The church has never received a dollar of missionary aid, but on the contrary began at once to reach out a hand of help to communities less able or less resolute. In that first year it gave one hundred and forty-two dollars to missions. And during all the years of its life it has been giving gladly to the work of Christ at home and abroad and to all the local charities and benevolences around the bay. During the fifty years this church has contributed through the various channels of its activity the sum of $1,252,958.22—of this amount $442,628.94 was given away for benevolence and charity.

This does not include the large sums of money given by the members of this church to countless forms of Christian work and charitable endeavor outside. It we should undertake to

include in the record of this church's giving all that amount we should almost need to call in some professor of higher mathematics. It will be remembered that the beautiful and useful building of the Social Settlement yonder was given entirely by an honored trustee of this church. The noble Christian work for almost a hundred girls who are without their natural providers yonder on Cottage Hill was projected by the thought and love of two generous members of this church, and it has been generously endowed by them for all the years to come. The Chabot Home for working women was given and endowed by a member of this congregation. When the $200,000 was being raised for the new Young Men's Christian Association building soon to be dedicated it was noticed by those who had the matter in charge that more than one-half of the money was subscribed by members of this church—two of our members heading the list with subscriptions of $30,000 each. When that useful addition was made to the equipment of Fabiola Hospital, the Dottie Cook Annex for children, it was given outright by a member of this church. And if we should include all the gifts to the Young Women's Christian Association and to the Ladies' Relief Society, to the King's Daughters' Home and to the establishment of the Associated Charities and to other

worthy institutions in our city, the benevolence of this people would amount to several additional millions of dollars. It was said of Christ most accurately, "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." This church has stood in the community not to be served but to serve, and it has given generously of its life for the common good.

In these days when so many critical and unkindly words are being spoken of the Christian church by thoughtless people who do not understand its method and life it may be well to spend this half hour in thinking of some of the things for which a single church has stood and in naming a few of the things it has actually accomplished. And what I have indicated here has been in process of accomplishment in countless other churches Protestant, Catholic and Hebrew in this community and in all the communities of the Christian world.

It was the spiritual leader and inspirer of the ages who held this institution in such high esteem as to say, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Hold the church in high esteem for its work's sake and for its worth's sake and for the sake of Him who founded it and is at this hour its exalted head.

All this that I have been relating is history. I have been looking back over fifty years. This church has written chapters of achievement worthy to be bound up in that greater Book of Acts now in process of composition. But at this hour we are also to look ahead. Fifty years more—that will round out a century of church life! Not many of us will be upon the scene then—only four of the original members of this church still survive—but some minister of Christ will stand here or somewhere to review what we as men and women, what we as boys and girls grown to maturity shall have done for the advancement of righteousness, for the relief of need and for the extension of the kingdom of our Lord. Hallow this fiftieth year then and make it a jubilee by your more complete spirit of consecration. Give the best you have in you to the service of Christ and then those fifty years which lie ahead will be under the blessing of God yet more glorious. They will serve to round out a century of Christian work and worship which will make glad the city of God.

November 20, 1910.

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